

political, economic, moral, and philosophic problems facing man, and will offer us many different systems which might be applied to these problems.

## THE SETTING OF MILTON'S EIGHTEENTH SONNET

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The Waldenses, or Vaudois, are adherents of the oldest protestant heresy in Europe; it arose in 1170, taking its name from Peter Waldo, a merchant of Lyons, in France, and spread into the mountain valleys to the southwest of Turin, in the Duchy of Piedmont and Savoy, where it exists to this day. It, of course, was often subject to persecution by the Holy Office, since the Dukes of Piedmont and Savoy were Roman Catholics. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the last member of this family lost the throne of Italy only a few years ago. In 1487, Innocent VIII issued a bull calling for the extermination of these heretics; but this crusade proved abortive, and created such havoc that the Duke finally put a stop to it, and granted a limited toleration. For a while, at least, the Vaudois were let alone; after all, crusades had gone out of fashion. In 1530, these simple peasants sent representatives to the leaders of heresy at Geneva, and, after they had made a number of changes in their crude and simple doctrines and practices, were absorbed into the general current of religious revolt. This was regrettable, for, in 1650, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, who were charged with stamping out heresy everywhere, set up a local council in Turin, and Charles Emmanuel II, Duke of Savoy, came under their influence. In 1655, he ordered the reduction of the Vaudois to the limits of their ancient territory, and an army, made up partly of troops of Louis XIV, and partly of Irish refugees, invaded their valleys during the week of October 17, 1655. Unfortunately the soldiers, and especially the Irish, who had bitter memories of the horrible cruelty of Cromwell in 1650, when prisoners had been slaughtered by having their skulls crushed by the butts of muskets, in order to save powder, were savage, and the Vaudois were subjected to barbarities which shocked all Europe.

to the courts of Europe in diplomatic Latin, and it gives expression to his personal horror and anger.

There are three allusions in this piece to the Pope and Church; one of them takes the form of what looks suspiciously like a pun, when Milton refers to "the triple Tyrant." The Pope, of course, is the wearer of the triple tiara. Another allusion is the conventional one, from the seventeenth chapter of the Book of Revelation, used by protestant polemicists, who have called the Church "Babylon the Great, the mother of Harlots and abominations of the Earth." The third allusion is to the idolatry of the Church, that worships "Stocks and Stones." A leader of the Vaudois, Jean Leger, who was exiled from Savoy after the persecutions, was responsible for the story of the mother rolled "with Infant down the Rocks." But the sonnet is, on the whole, an expression of personal feelings; as in the other sonnets, there is none of the attempt to objectify and universalize a personal feeling which has made "Lycidas" so very much more than just a sentimental and melancholy effusion. In none of his mature verse is Milton's own personality, his own feeling, his own thoughts, so close to the surface as in his sonnets.

The unfortunate persecution of these simple, rather uncouth and primitive peasants would most probably have been forgotten, along with hundreds of other examples of fanaticism which had been the cause of so many wars and so much bloodshed and so little decision in Europe since the dawn of modern times, if it were not for this splendid sonnet. After all, Europe had had enough of fanaticism, and the religious zeal of such rulers as Cromwell and the Duke of Savoy was no longer to disturb the peace of Europe. Christianity has not recovered from the reaction that these two centuries brought about; and Cromwell and Charles Emmanuel, and Milton, in their enthusiasm for their conceptions of God, were, if only in that sense, men of a time that was presently to be past. But this sonnet immortalizes an aspect, perhaps only an insignificant aspect of that age; yet its greatness lies less in its subject, which is hardly a universal one, which is, in fact, little more than the angered outburst of a passing moment, than in the splendour and rolling grandeur of its words. Who can show a finer example of "emotion recollected in tranquillity?"

